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A Family for Every Child

Adopting a child with hearing loss

Families who adopt from foster care are often open to unique challenges and special needs than families who adopt privately. Being open to different special needs takes special though and consideration, in addition to education and research. This is one family's story about their decision to adopt a child who is deaf.

Adopting a child with hearing loss.
By Anonymous

Like most families adopting for their first time, we entered the process without much regard to the life-changing decisions that lay ahead of us. As we contemplated adoption, we were faced with typical thought-provoking inquiries:

- do we have a preference for gender?
- would we consider an older child?
- what ethnicity?
- with or without special needs?
- a single child or sibling group?

Initially, it was all very overwhelming, as we had only just completed our final course of fertility treatments and emotions were running high. However, as we embarked, each step incrementally came into focus until the journey itself became crystal clear for our family uniting.
We knew we wanted to adopt a daughter and eventually, we agreed to an age range (0-5 years). We did not 'feel' ready for a sibling group and we had little to no preference with respect to ethnicity. The last decision, "special needs"? Hmmm.
As we pondered the list of 'special needs', we wondered how we would fair with a known diagnosis of ADD or vision loss, learning disability or motor delay, missing limb, heart defect, Down Syndrome, diabetes, etc. These discussions prompted us to:

1. Define our comfort zone, and
2. Explore the idea of stepping outside our comfort zone

Adopting a child with any disability was not initially on our radar screen, but as we

considered our options, we became open to the idea of adopting a child with a hearing loss. As a special educator with a Master's Degree in the Education of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing, it didn't seem like such a big leap from educating a child with a hearing loss to parenting a child with hearing loss. In short, we felt due to our life experiences and career choices, well prepared to take on this particular challenge.

Would we have made this leap without my educational training and professional experience? In hindsight, I believe we would have, though it may have required more due diligence on our part to reach that 'comfort zone'. For this reason, I have outlined a few data points for other prospective adoptive families who might consider a child with hearing loss.

Communication

All parents of deaf children (whether adopted or biological), must explore and ultimately decide the best mode of communication for their child. Some are candidates for amplification and listening, and spoken language may be an option. Those who are not candidates for amplification generally explore a visual modality, such as Sign Language. In the past decade, American Sign Language has become more popular within the hearing community. It is offered in many high schools, colleges, and universities as an alternative to traditional foreign languages. It is also used with typical-hearing babies as a means to spark language development. This exposure results in more typical-hearing people aware of and skilled in Signing, thereby, creating opportunities for more deaf people who sign to interact with hearing people who sign. Learning any second language though, requires time, effort and commitment. Sign Language classes are available throughout the United States . Local community colleges and Universities are a good place to start exploring if you are interested in classes. You can also contact your local school district for additional information.

Technology

As advancements in technology have made life easier in all areas, so it is for individuals with hearing loss. The improvements to amplification have provided access to sound for children who otherwise would not have been able to hear. Hearing aids and cochlear implants work wonders for some deaf children to access the auditory world we live in. Audiometric deafness in this day and age, is no longer synonymous with being functionally deaf. Individuals who can access sound may be able to learn how to process speech signals auditorally and thereby, may be able to develop speech. Children can learn how to function in the hearing world with devices such as closed-captioning, FM systems (a transmitter and receiver which help to mitigate distance and background noise), personal hearing aids or implants with input cables for IPODS, cell phones and laptops, video phones for Signing individuals to converse', etc.

Education

Early Intervention Services are available in every state in the U.S. for children with special needs for the age range of 0-3 years, including hearing loss. Each local school district is then responsible for educating children with special needs from the age of 3-21 years of age. All of these services must be provided free of charge to families. Districts are required by law to offer a continuum of services for children with special needs. With respect to deaf children, this equates to programs supporting various communication modalities (i.e. Programs for children who use Sign Language and programs for children who use amplification devices and use listening and spoken language skills.) Contact your local school district's Special Education Department for services available in your area.

Conclusion

Recent special education protocol calls for people-first labels because it puts the person before the label . i.e. instead of the label 'Deaf Child', a child who is deaf or a child who has hearing loss. The spirit of adoption calls for the same observance: the children are

children first who happen to have a disability (hearing loss), and who all deserve consideration of a home where they can receive opportunity, support, love and most of all, a family.
Source

Additional Information

To learn more about adopting a child with hearing loss, find children that have this special need, connect with families advocating for hard of hearing children, and more, please visit the Rainbow Kids page on Deaf/Hard of Hearing Adoption

To learn more about other special needs, view waiting children that have these needs, connect with other adoptive families and more, please visit the Rainbow Kids page on Special Needs Adoption